

COOPERATION FOR TEACHERS AND EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC

Sitaniselao Stan Manu, Seu'ula Johansson Fua, Sereana Tagivakatini

Institute of Education
University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Abstract : The Institute of Education (IOE) at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji has recently completed a desk study on “Teachers and Education in the Pacific” (TEP). The first of a multi-phase study, which is co-funded by ADB and AusAID, involves a desk study which concluded in a regional workshop that was hosted by IOE in December 2007. A total of 13 country reports were disseminated and discussed during the workshop. This article reviews the main findings of the desk study and outlines the issues discussed in the TEP workshop that are either common around the region or unique to each country, with particular focus here on possible areas for international cooperation.

Keywords : Teacher education, Pacific education, international cooperation

Introduction

The Institute of Education (IOE) at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji was established to work with USP's member states in the development and advancement of education in the region. The Institute's vision is to be *a regional hub of excellence in Pacific education* with a mandate to support Pacific peoples and their communities in providing quality, relevant, sound and effective advice, research, training and publications to meet their educational needs, challenges and aspirations. The IOE has close links with various schools within USP (including the School of Education), regional education ministries, teacher training colleges and other educational organisations. Over the years, the IOE has strengthened its regional network and involvement in regional projects; the PRIDE project is one such project ¹.

Towards the end of 2007, IOE completed the first phase of another project — a desk study on “Teachers and Education in the Pacific” (TEP) — which is part of a multi-phased study currently co-funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Australia Agency for International Development (AusAID). The TEP project

was initiated out of a necessity that arose from concerns about teachers and education throughout the Pacific developing countries. Issues of teacher development and competence, role clarification, motivation, reward and compensation are sometimes considered non-conducive to the goals of student learning and improved schools. Of concern are the all too common problems associated with limited teaching resources and professional development opportunities, unfavourable school environments, isolated or unfamiliar professional practices, and unclear relationships with parents and community stakeholders.

The requested technical assistance that was first drafted by IOE for the TEP project was intended, first, to identify options for policy and strategy framework that can improve the effectiveness of teacher performance, and second, to develop concept papers for sustainable plans of action at the national and possibly regional levels that would support the implementation of strategies to improve teacher performance in the Pacific. The desk study for TEP was then initiated, and it concluded with regional workshop which was hosted by IOE last year (December 5-7, 2007) in Suva, Fiji.

The workshop involved more than 30 participants, with 22 country participants from USP's 12 member states² plus participants from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and other representatives from local, regional and international agencies.

The workshop focused on 13 participating country reports, which were prepared by a TEP research team from IOE. Each country report identified key issues for teachers and teacher education and proposed issues and areas for further scrutiny, discussion and research and where further assistance would be useful. In his recent report to the Network of Pacific Educators (NOPE), dated January 2008, the IOE Director at the time, Dr Kabini Sanga, noted that the discussions during the workshop were "lively, engaging and with a new level of honesty and determination". What came across strongly is that there is a need for *research and identification of best practice(s)* to inform policy and practices in ways that will improve teacher performance in the Pacific region. The final day of the workshop was used to discuss the second phase of the TEP Project, which is set to be a research study.

One of the key outcomes of this regional meeting was the unanimous agreement amongst the TEP participants that all 12 member states plus PNG are to participate in the second phase. A concern was raised however that the current project donors (ADB-AusAID) may not sufficiently support all participating countries in the next phase of the project. It was agreed that the TEP group (IOE's TEP team and all 13 countries) will look into other alternative ways of enabling all countries to participate fully in the rest of the study. It was heartening nevertheless that the spirit of solidarity among the participating countries was tremendously encouraging for IOE's TEP team in preparation for the second phase of the study.

Using the comments and feedback from the workshop, the TEP team has subsequently revised each country report and endorsements were then requested before submission of the final report to ADB-AusAID. Nevertheless, it was highlighted from the TEP workshop that there are issues and concerns to be attended to, some more serious and/or urgent than others, particularly in improving teacher performance in the Pacific region. It also came across clearly that the

desk study found some issues to be common throughout the region as well as key issues that are unique and country-specific.

TEP Project's Preliminary Findings

The desk review of key data regarding the current status of teacher demand, supply, deployment and work environment, found various key issues involving teachers and teacher education in the Pacific. One of the objectives of the desk study has been to review past programs and projects that have attempted to improve teacher performance in the past decade and to analyse gaps in the research literature in order to identify where future research would be most useful. Each country report has proposed issues and areas for further scrutiny, discussion and research. The following outlines the main findings of TEP's desk review:

1. There is a need to *identify practices and understandings that will best inform policies to improve the performance of teachers*.
2. There is a need for evidence-based policies specific to teachers to be developed. Such policy will guide any future teachers and teacher education development. The *research-based approach* to planning and implementation is probably the best way forward in which beliefs are practiced in looking at issues holistically; it keeps everyone grounded in reality; and the research outcomes yield the directions that need to be taken.
3. The issue of teacher quality was highlighted, both in terms of in-service training as well as pre-service training. There are still a high number of untrained and uncertified teachers working in primary schools all over the region. Various efforts to improve teacher quality include national teacher training colleges collaborating with overseas institutions including USP, either through accredited teacher training program or through local institution's technical assistance program.
4. The issue of teacher supply in the region still remains a key challenge, both for countries that do have national teacher-training colleges and also those without. On top of that, the *teacher:student ratio* continues to increase across the region. Cook Islands, and may be Niue too (due mainly to its decline student enrolment), are the only countries in the

- region which have adequate supplies of teachers at the primary school level.
5. There is a need for up-to-date and easy-to-access data for forecasting the demand for teachers. The availability of data on teacher recruitment, retention and transfer is still very much lacking in the region but such database is acknowledged to be very useful for forecasting teacher demand and supply. Tonga and Solomon Islands in particular have expressed interest in this priority.
 6. There is a need to re-evaluate the different language policies currently used in teaching throughout the region particularly in relation to the use of the vernacular language. Similarly, the importance of teachers in the maintenance of culture and language through its use and inclusion in the classroom was also highlighted. There is a huge challenge in most countries where the public perceives the use of a vernacular language in the classroom as hindrance or even detrimental to students' understanding of subject-content materials, particularly in the learning of mathematics and science. Re-valuing the vernacular language in education helps strengthens the "de-colonization" process and at the same time assumes ownership of education. It also allows access to specific or unique socio-cultural knowledge and skills, and its use helps revive and/or maintain its status.
 7. The supply of teaching resources and teacher-aid materials remains an issue for all Pacific Island countries. Related to this are the issues of equity and funding (e.g. distribution between boys/girls, rural/urban schools or mainland/outer islands), and in particular a concern about *relevancy* of teaching materials to the curriculum³. Much work remains in developing teacher education curriculum, pedagogy, programs, staff capacity and support resources for teacher education, which remains to be a core issue for teacher education in the region.
 8. In addition to strengthening teacher-training colleges, there is also a need to strengthen institutional and community partnerships as parents continue to provide funding throughout the year for most primary schools in the region. There is great interest in exploring the potential of utilizing community supports in the provision of learning and teaching services particularly in the areas of curriculum, teaching pedagogy and school leadership. Community empowerment in school can lead to nurturing ownership of education in the communities, and this is further developed by encouraging functions that mobilize schools, in collaboration with the local residents.
 9. There is a need to consider how quality and recruitment of teacher trainees may be related or influenced by (un)availability of monetary allowances. Cook Islands, the only country in the region known to adequately supply for its teacher demand, has invested in its teacher recruitment program through provision of monthly allowances. There are however other possible innovative strategies for teacher recruitment that need to be investigated.
 10. Similar to (9) above, retention of teachers, particularly qualified teachers, within the work force is a serious concern in the region. The issue of teacher salary and work conditions continues to direct draining out of more teachers in search of better-paid job or other opportunities overseas, or even other professions within the country. The Government sometimes had to respond in this kind of situation by injecting most of its education budget to cover demands for high teachers' salaries, leaving very little funds for teachers' professional developments, school resources and other basic needs such as maintenance of school buildings and facilities. Moreover, teacher-movement between school systems (e.g. church and government schools) is quite a challenge for those schools with low- or under-paid teachers.
 11. An interesting fact: the supply of primary school teachers in the region has been largely in favour of women. Right across the region, there is a strong trend towards women teachers at the primary school level, which was noted to be as high as 70% in some countries. The implications of this trend particularly at the primary school level for teaching pedagogy, boys' learning, classroom discipline and gender equity have yet to be studied although are very much needed for consideration.
- The TEP report provided a foundation upon which discussion may take place to understand the significant relationship between teachers and education in the Pacific. It is in no way the complete story as limitations to the nature of TEP's desk study itself — availability of documents, accuracy of information, scope of work, and reporting of the data — were noted as lessons learnt

for future studies. The TEP report is supposed to be used for dialogue with various educational stakeholders such as the national ministries of education, national teacher-training colleges and other development partners who are genuinely interested in improving teacher performance in the region.

All the TEP issues noted earlier are obviously multifaceted, dynamic and are interrelated even though some of them may be different in each of the 13 countries. While the current status of teachers and education in the Pacific (based on result of the desk study) appears to be discouraging, the solutions may still lie within the nature of the issues themselves and how each country, or the region for that matter, responds to those issues.

“South-South” Pacific Cooperation

The issue of quality assurance of teacher-training colleges across the region had prompted the cooperation between neighbouring countries particularly in the South Pacific region. For instance, Tokelau sent its teacher trainees to Samoa; Tuvalu, Tonga and Solomon Islands sent trainees to Fiji (not just USP); Niue and Cook Islands had sent their trainees to New Zealand; and Nauru sent its trainees to Australia. What is of the essence here is that smaller countries (or islands) cooperate with bigger countries while countries with teacher-training colleges provide support for those countries without. Indeed, it is a case of “South-South Cooperation” within the Pacific region, including the assistance of Australia and New Zealand.

The advantages of any South-South Cooperation model include *enhanced ownership of the development process by developing countries; sharing of technology and best practices that are more appropriate to the needs of the developing countries; and encouraging self-reliance through identifying local solutions based on experience of developing countries*⁴.

Within the Pacific regional cooperation scheme, there is also the potential for greater support and partnership between the communities, the schools, the institutions, the ministries and also the international agencies and external donor partners. In some cases, a multi-lateral partnership is preferred particularly on

issues considered common across the region, while in some cases a bi-lateral partnership can be seen as the most appropriate way to go. Through a greater partnership, whether with other institutions and/or donor agencies, countries can share best practices and strategies to address some of the issues raised.

A major challenge in the Pacific, however, is that most in-service training programs, with their high costs of delivery (e.g. Kiribati, with its geographically scattered islands), are too dependent on donor's assistance. To make matters worse, the programs are sometimes not offered on a regular basis or when needed, and are also quite often limited to the project each was designed for, even though the program materials may not be as appropriate or specific to the needs of the teachers involved. In these kinds of situations, sensible programs and strategic cooperation are needed.

The importance therefore of strengthening institutional linkages and improving teacher education not only nationally but also regionally and internationally is really vital to the sustainable development, productivity and quality of teacher education in the Pacific. Transferability of teachers within the region can easily benefit from this program, particularly in cases where teacher supply has been met, such as the case in Cook Islands. It is equally important that such sharing is also reflected in students' higher-level education particularly at USP — the leading regional provider for teacher education and training colleges in the Pacific. Most of the region's smaller countries without any teacher-training college — Tuvalu, Niue, Tokelau and Nauru — are very much dependent on this kind of training scheme. In these isolated, smaller USP member states, teacher education training is available through distance education mode, provided through their local USP extension centres.

It is commonly understood that the features of modern distance education is *that everyone, at any time and in any place, can learn what is targeted for*, which is very important to the construction of a lifelong education system. Modern distance education ranks among the most important modes of education in the 21st century. Compared with traditional education, modern distance education presents more advantages.

However, there still is a long way to go and the Pacific is faced with many problems to educate people about networking. The construction of network resources, its management and sharing, the protection of intellectual property rights and the setting up of an operating mechanism to help maintain a continual virtuous development are some of the challenges yet to be resolved. But one key to solving the above-mentioned problem(s) is to strengthen cooperation. There is therefore an opportunity to cooperate with more schools, cities and countries on distance education and form a distance education network in the Asia-Pacific region.

While the South-South Cooperation in the Pacific region have many advantages, the priority for each country still focuses on nurturing and developing capacity and sustainable capability in teacher education, which is widely seen by many educational agencies (e.g. JICA) as the ultimate objective. This view, which is based on the idea that education is a cornerstone of “nation-building”⁵, looks at the solution to most issues associated with teacher education (or any educational area for that matter) in light of “ownership” more than anything else; that is, *the ability of each country to take the initiative or the lead in the development and in achieving sustainability of its education programs*.

From the Pacific point of view, the intention has been to present a Pacific way of planning any project that will bring together what is best of both the Pacific and global practices. Within this exercise the premise has always been that Pacific epistemologies (ways of thinking and knowing) and values are central to the process of (education) planning. ‘People of the Ocean’, as Pacific people are sometimes referred to (Hau’ofa, 1993), implies a sense of connectedness to nature, which can be viewed also to include a sense of connectedness to all other people who share the same ocean. This view recognizes the centrality, for Pacific people, of *social relationship*, which exhibits the predominant values of respect and reciprocity. It is also the distinct feature of how social capital in the Pacific is more valuable than economic capital. Education after all is one such organization that is loaded with values, which underpin structures, processes and programmes.

Japan’s International Cooperation

The first phase of the TEP project, which gave rise to the country reports and the regional workshop hosted by IOE last year, is at first an *issue-based approach* to comprehensively analyzing a specific issue to be resolved and for the advancement of the roll-out phase(s). But while the TEP report details issues specific to areas of teaching and teacher education, the approach towards eradicating some of the problems associated with teachers and education in the Pacific can effectively be addressed *regionally or country-based*.

In both approaches, Japan, or any international country or agency, can work alongside both regional and/or country institutions in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a particular project. Capacity building assistance in training to provide know-how for teachers in one system or country and then transferring that knowledge and skills to assist others’ capacity building is certainly a viable option within a South-South Pacific Cooperation scheme. Within such scheme, a trained country will then be situated in a better position to assist other countries in the region.

Understandably, problems vary from region to region and from country to country. To address the diverse development issues affecting particular region or country, donor partners must first formulate project implementation plans for individual countries and to decide on how these should proceed. This can be one of the biggest challenges. In some cases, modification of projects or programs to suit local circumstances and work to ensure that local views are incorporated is what is really needed.

One issue that often challenges all parties involved in a particular bi-lateral or multi-lateral project is flexibility. Sometimes the timing and duration are proposed first and agreed by the recipients while other times they are dictated by the donor(s). The donor(s) can be frustrated by the first option, while the latter can be a challenge, and in some cases, ineffective as far as the recipients are concerned in terms of whether their needs are addressed or recognized. It is understandable that donors often would like “to utilize their resources and experiences to the extent possible, dynamic and effective mobilization of resources are achieved”

(Kawakami, 2001). What needs not be forgotten is that *the importance of capacity building efforts on the recipient country side through human resource development* should be the primary goal in international aid.

There is no question that Asia has been for some time now in the process of replacing the West in the Pacific (Crocombe, 2007). Crocombe (2007) claims that this process is “irreversible”; hence the Pacific Islands and its people “need to prepare to live with them” (p. 379). There is therefore no denying of the significant role and powerful influence Japan, among other developed nations in Asia, plays in, and/or holds for, the Pacific region. But while such role welcomes countries like Japan to be involved in Pacific affairs, the approach to educational aid, for example, “must be sensitive to underlying contextual considerations within the communities aided” (Sanga, 2003, p. 28).

Concluding Remark

In her opening keynote speech at the December 2007 TEP regional workshop, Dr Ana Taufe' ulungaki, a prominent Pacific educator and former USP's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Affairs, addressed the participants about the importance of setting a clear country vision for education. She asked, “What kinds of communities do we want for the Pacific? What type of citizens do we want to produce out of our schools? What skills, knowledge and values are needed by these communities? What curriculum, and most importantly, what kind of teachers and teaching are needed to advance the vision?”⁶

Failure to build a clear collective vision can further perpetuate one of the key struggles for Pacific education; and that is: “lack of ownership by Pacific people of formal education process” (Taufe' ulungaki, 2002: 2). It is in this lesson and certainly through a greater understanding of the Pacific context that answers must be found to address the issues of teachers and teacher education in the region. Ultimately the goal of achieving Education For All, poverty reduction and sustainable development can be realized, may be even earlier than expected, if the priorities are right and the collaboration between parties is in harmony with the true spirit of cooperation.

As JICA's President had acknowledged⁷, Japan, through history and experience, firmly realizes the importance of respecting and nurturing self-help efforts and ownership by developing countries. A beneficial, lasting bi-lateral or multi-lateral relationship would certainly allow the flow of information to be shared more easily and efficiently. Along this line of mutual understanding is accepting and respecting cultural differences. Japan already knows too well how important culture is, and because of that it has nothing to lose but stands to benefit greatly from the advantage of international cooperation.

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Note about the main author:

Dr Sitaniselao Stan Manu, a *Fellow in Mathematics and Assessment* at the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, was a *Visiting Research Fellow* at Naruto University of Education in January-February 2008.

List of endnotes.

¹ The *Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education* (PRIDE) project is implemented by the Institute of Education at USP and is jointly funded by the European Union and New Zealand. The project seeks to enhance student learning in 15 Pacific countries by strengthening the capacity of each Ministry of Education (or equivalent) to plan and deliver quality basic education. For more information, please visit website: <http://www.usp.ac.fj/pride>.

² USP member states: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

³ IOE has the endorsement of the South Pacific Board for Education Assessment (SPBEA) to consider developing course materials for senior high school subject materials. Currently all subject materials (e.g. mathematics textbooks) used by both senior students and teachers are either purchased from New Zealand or Australia even though all formal assessments have been set and monitored locally by SPBEA.

⁴ Taken from the Opening Speech delivered by Mr Takao Kawakami, JICA's President, at the South-South Cooperation workshop, *World Summit on Sustainable Development* (Johannesburg, August, 2002).

⁵ Speech by Mr Takao Kawakami, JICA's President, at an UNESCO EFA High Level Meeting on October 30, 2001.

⁶ Recorded by Dr Kabini Sanga, IOE Director at the time, in his recent report to the Network of Pacific Educators (NOPE), dated January 2008.

⁷ Mr Takao Kawakami, JICA's President, at the South-South Cooperation workshop, *World Summit on Sustainable Development* (Johannesburg, August, 2002).

要 約

南太平洋大学教育学部では、「太平洋諸国における教師と教育」に関する研究を実施したところである。ADB 及び AusAID からの共同出資による多側面からなる本研究には、南太平洋大学教育学部により 2007 年 12 月に開催された地域研修が含まれる。研修においては、延べ 13 カ国からの報告がなされ議論が展開された。

本稿では、主な研究成果と研修で議論された内容について、13 カ国共通のものから各国特有のものまであるが、特に国際協力の観点から焦点を当て報告を行う。

(訳責：教員教育国際協力センター)